

## **THE “GREATER HUNGARY” PROJECT AND EUROPEAN SECURITY ISSUES**

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### **Abstract**

*The national idea of «Greater Hungary» developed by Hungarian national authorities considers the spread of its influence in the regions densely populated by the Hungarian diaspora: South Slovakia, Transylvania (Romania), Vojvodina (Serbia) and the Transcarpathian region (Ukraine). This article examines the danger concealed by this project for Central and Eastern European countries. The attempts of its implementation in the policy and practice of contemporary Hungarian right-wing political parties are considered. It is argued that all the issues of ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries must be solved taking into account the stands of the governments of those countries.*

**Keywords: Greater Hungary, Hungarian minority, Transylvania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine**

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## 1. Introduction

The national idea of «Greater Hungary» developed by Hungarian national authorities considers the spread of its influence in the regions densely populated by the Hungarian diaspora: South Slovakia, Transylvania (Romania), Vojvodina (Serbia) and the Transcarpathian region (Ukraine). Until World War I, these territories were fully or partially included in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which failed as the result of military operations.<sup>2</sup> There was an open meeting of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Hungarian Parliament on 18 November 2010, held to discuss the problems of the Hungarian minority. During this event, the Hungarian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Zsolt Németh, talked about the necessity to create autonomies for Hungarians in Transylvania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, Budapest has regularly exploited the idea that, in the neighboring countries, the Hungarian minority suffers discriminatory harassment by local authorities and has inspired separatists-autonomist sentiments among the Hungarian diaspora communities. Generally, it is typical for Budapest to overstate data on Hungarians in diaspora. Thus, it is assumed that approximately 2.5 million citizens of Hungarian origin live in Romania (the Romanians put the figure at 1.7 million). For Transcarpathian Ukraine, this figure reaches 400,000 ethnic Hungarians, while the Ukrainians give a total of 156,000. In Slovakia, the figure provided by Budapest is 600,000 citizens of Hungarian origin, while the Slovaks speak of 520,000. Only in relation to the ethnic Hungarians in the Autonomous

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<sup>2</sup> Orenstein, M., *Vengerskiy Putin?*, 13 February 2015, retrieved from <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/1499325/>, last accessed on February 15, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Regnum information agency, 29 January 2011, retrieved from <http://regnum.ru/news/polit/1369525.html>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

Province of Vojvodina, Budapest and Belgrade give the same number – a little more than 251,000 people.<sup>4</sup>

The evidence of an active, aggressive policy by Viktor Orbán’s government is consecutive to the implementation of the long-term program «Hungarian national policy – the basis of national policy strategy» adopted at the beginning of 2012, which stipulates the establishment of autonomies in the regions of compact residence of Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries, as the ultimate goal by 2020. It is considered that such plans can be realized through targeted and multifaceted support to communities of Hungarians living abroad, propaganda actions, the development of Hungarian-language education and the funding of civil societies.

In its search for ways to implement this program, in August 2012 the Hungarian cabinet adopted a strategy of Hungarian economic growth in the Carpathian Basin called «Vekerle Plan», named after I. Vekerle, a Hungarian economist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Minister of Finance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This strategy aims to transform the region into a center of economic development, on which the leading business structures of border areas from neighboring countries with compact Hungarian minorities will be oriented. This document provides for a synchronization of infrastructure development and creation of a single labor market in the Carpathian Basin, designed to strengthen the economic presence of Hungary in the neighboring countries and its output to the position of regional leader. The «Vekerle Plan» is considered by the neighboring countries, especially Romania and Slovakia, as a mechanism of

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<sup>4</sup> Zhiryakov I., Barabanov M., *Project “Velikaya Vengriya” v politike sovremennykh vengerskikh pravih partiy*, 2012, retrieved from <http://knigilib.net/book/359-istoricheskie-nauki-vestnik-212/11-proekt-velikaya-vengriya-v-politike-sovremennykh-vengerskix-pravyx-partij.html>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

Budapest's interference with their internal affairs.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Hungarian government actively supports and constantly increases the funding of Hungary's permanent Council (Magyar Allando Ertekezlet: MAERT), whose declared priority is the struggle for the establishment of the Hungarian autonomy in Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine.<sup>6</sup>

In 2013, according to a decision adopted by the Orbán government, the principles for the funding of Hungarians organizations abroad were significantly simplified. It was aimed to enhance the impact of Hungarians organizations in neighboring countries with the purpose to create Hungarian autonomous entities around the perimeter of Hungary's borders and to lobby for Budapest's interests in the region. The simplification of procedures for obtaining Hungarian citizenship serves as the main tactical goal of the Hungarian side towards a national autonomy in the area of compact residence of Transcarpathian Hungarians, that is for an artificial increase of the number of Hungarians living abroad, in the coming years.

The above mentioned decision indicates that the Orbán government plans to further strengthen the support for Hungarian organizations in the neighboring countries, with the purpose of inspiring autonomous and separatist sentiments inside them. The far-right party «Jobbik» («Movement for a better Hungary») is characterized by xenophobia, anti-Gypsy and anti-Semitic slogans, anti-globalization stances and socially minded populism. The party was founded by a group of radical right-wing students from the department of Humanities at the University of Budapest and by followers of the nationalist « Party of Justice and Life». The party competed in the 2006 elections, among anti-government demonstrations, but got less than 2 percent of the votes and failed to enter the

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<sup>5</sup> *Another new Hungarian economic plan that will hit the dust*, 2012, retrieved from <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2012/08/29/another-new-hungarian-economic-plan-that-will-hit-the-dust/>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> *A Magyar Allando Ertekezlet Dokumentumai*, 2002, retrieved from [http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/alcim\\_pdf1088.pdf](http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/alcim_pdf1088.pdf), last accessed on November 15, 2014.

Hungarian parliament. The paramilitary wing of the party, the «Hungarian Guard», was created in 2007 and was banned and dissolved in July 2009 for using items and symbols of the Hungarian Nazis of the 1940s – «nihilashysts». During the elections to the European Parliament in 2009, the party list, headed by the former liberal rights defender Krisztina Morvai won 14.77% of votes (3 seats out of 22 assigned to Hungary).<sup>7</sup>

A study of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, entitled «Hungary: Going in the Wrong Direction?», indicates that, with the assistance of politicians from the local Hungarian communities, and with Russian help, Budapest is trying to create domestic problems in the neighboring countries. It is reported that Russia will use internal economic pressure, demanding autonomy for the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, where the Hungarian minority lives, to create conflict between NATO members and between Romania and Hungary. Moreover, through its intervention in European countries, Russia tries to change their foreign policies and adapt them to the Russian sphere of influence.<sup>8</sup>

Budapest’s plan aimed at strengthening ethnic boundaries without granting appropriate rights for citizens (Hungarian citizenship, in particular, gives the Diaspora representatives only voting rights, as for citizens in Hungary itself), and the risks of being deprived of their original citizenship, may put some Hungarians living abroad in a bad position. Except for the title of «Hungarian citizen», the state is unlikely to offer any more to compatriots living in other countries. Slovakia has

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<sup>7</sup> *Jobbik: the movement for a better Hungary* (2009), retrieved from <http://www.jobbik.com/>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Haines J., *Hungary: Going in the Wrong Direction?*, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2014/09/hungary-going-wrong-direction>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

warned that it will withdraw its citizenship from those who will take the Hungarian one. Hungarians in other countries can get into the same scrape.<sup>9</sup>

## ***2. Ukraine and the “Greater Hungary” project***

The growing popularity and strength of far-right forces in Hungary could adversely affect relations between Kyiv and Budapest, sharpening the debates on the condition of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine. Generally, Hungary’s increased influence on the ethno-political situation in some parts of the Carpathian region contradicts the basic principles of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, signed by the Ukrainian and Hungarian governments in 1993.<sup>10</sup>

«Jobbik» tried to make the issue of Hungarian territorial autonomy in Ukraine a subject of pre-election campaign in Hungary, requiring the deployment of EU forces to Transcarpathia (this statement was made in the European Parliament by the party’s representative, Krisztina Morvai) with the pretext of preventing escalation of ethnic conflicts in Ukraine. Such positions led to a sharp growth in «Jobbik»’s rating, up to 22% of the votes.

It should also be noted that «Jobbik» sent their MEP, Béla Kovács, as an observer to the referendum in Crimea, and he reported that the consultation was conducted democratically and transparently. In addition, there were repeated calls from representatives of Hungarian right-wing organizations for applying towards Ukraine measures similar to those applied by Russian Federation in Crimea.<sup>11</sup> A

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<sup>9</sup> *Vengriya nashla obrazets dlya vengerskih avtonomiy v Rumunii, Slovakii, Serbii i na Ukraine*, 8 October 2010, retrieved from <http://cenovyna.pp.ua/?p=842>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Svitlyk Y., *Malenkiye shagi k “Velikoi Vengrii”*, 15 December 2010, retrieved from <http://www.mukachevo.net/ru/news/view/35380>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> *Jobbik: Hungarian government fails to speak out for the Hungarian minority in Ukraine*, 22 August 2014, retrieved from [http://www.jobbik.com/jobbik\\_hungarian\\_government\\_fails\\_to\\_speak\\_out\\_for\\_the\\_hungarian\\_minority\\_in\\_ukraine](http://www.jobbik.com/jobbik_hungarian_government_fails_to_speak_out_for_the_hungarian_minority_in_ukraine), last accessed on November 15, 2014.

striking example is the statement made by one of the leaders of the Hungarian extremist organization «Army Betyariv» («Betyársereg»), György Budaházi, chairman of the Hungarian radical organization «64 Hungarian counties», commander of the National Liberation Army «Hungarian arrows» and a radical supporter of political extremism. In March 2014 he announced the need to “take advantage of the historical chance for the reunion of Hungary in the borders prior to the signing of the Trianon agreement in 1920”.

In this context, on March 28, 2014, on the initiative of Tamás Gaudi-Nagy, a «Jobbik» representative in the National Assembly, a demonstration was organized in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Budapest, in support of the declaration of autonomy in the Transcarpathian region and calling for territorial separation from Ukraine. At the end of the protest, the petition «For Transcarpathia», which condemned the Hungarian government’s policy and called for effective measures for pushing forward territorial claims on Ukraine (that, in particular, did not exclude the use of Hungary’s armed forces) was handed to the Foreign Ministry in Budapest. In June 2014, in an interview with the Russian news agency «Russia Today», the leader of the «Jobbik» party, Gábor Vona, said that his political force would count on further Russian support on the issue of Hungarian autonomy in the Transcarpathian region. He also noted that ethnic cleansing took place in the the eastern regions of Ukraine and did not exclude the appearance of a similar situation in Transcarpathia.<sup>12</sup>

### ***3. Romania and the “Greater Hungary” project***

The issue of Transylvania, as a possible autonomous entity within Romania, is not only complicated by current events and processes, but has even

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*

been activated.<sup>13</sup> Officially, Hungary was deprived of northern Transylvania on February 10, 1947, at the Paris conference.<sup>14</sup> However, despite the existence of a number of international and bilateral agreements between Hungary and Romania, Budapest has never actually admitted the loss of the territory. The legal basis for this is the double change of political regime in Hungary in 1957 and 1990, and a radical change of the political structure in Romania in 1989. This led to a situation, according to which the treaty signed in Paris in 1947 should be performed only through the control of the United Nations, without taking to account positions of Budapest and Bucharest. Moreover, even now both countries accuse each other of involvement in the fighting against the Soviet Union during the Second World War (namely, the incident of July 22, 1941 at 5.10 am, when certain locations in Transylvania were bombed by unknown aircraft without distinctive signs). Hungary declared that the bombs were thrown by Romanian bombers PZL-37 Los of Polish production, while Bucharest officials blamed Hungarian Air Forces for bombardments with their bombers Sa.135 of Italian production. Hungarian, Romanian (N. Florianu), Ukrainian (A. Kotlobovskiy, A. Kharuk) and Polish historians even now make unsuccessful attempts to finish this historic dispute.

In this situation, given the fact that Hungary in 1999 and Romania in 2004 joined NATO and formally renounced territorial claims to each other, the only way of Budapest's influence on Transylvania (Hungarian government considers it is an ethnic territory of Hungary) is the attempt to create a Hungarian autonomy. The autonomy project proposed by the Democratic Union of Romanian Hungarians), actually amounts to the enclavization of Transylvania following the Kosovo model. But the Hungarian radicals have an interest not only in the enclavization of this area – the Hungarian nationalist circles are interested in the resources available in

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<sup>13</sup> Nemenskiy O., *Nezavisimost Kosovo i balkanizatsia Europi*, 2008, retrieved from <http://www.perspektivy.info/print.php?ID=35924>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

the Harghita, Covasna and Mures counties. But there is also a tendency to expand the collective rights of the Hungarian ethnic minority to the Bihor, Cluj and Satu Mare regions. The project devised by the Democratic Union of Romanian Hungarians stipulates the emergence of a state within the state, and is actually unconstitutional.

#### ***4. The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the “Greater Hungary” project***

The most unfavorable situation among all regions densely populated by Hungarian minorities is that of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (APV) in Serbia.<sup>15</sup> Hungarians hold the second place in terms of population – 251,136 inhabitants (13%) – and are actively represented in the government: the head of the National Assembly (Scoupshchina) of Vojvodina is an ethnic Hungarian, Ištvan Pastor. However, in Vojvodina there are no active irredentist feelings among the Hungarian community. The main explanation is that Hungarian irredentism in the APV wanes against the background of the separatist ideas held by a considerable number of inhabitants of the region. And the leaders in terms of separatist tendencies, as a rule, are not only Hungarians or other ethnic minority population of the province, but representatives of the Serbian majority, which accounts for 67% of the population. The reason for this is twofold. On the one hand, the Serbs, as well as other national communities, recognize their national identity, but, most importantly, there is an understanding of the regional identity among representatives of all communities, both on an individual and on a collective level. On the other hand, since 1997, the developments in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, followed by the declaration of independence of the territory, fueled

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<sup>15</sup> Tikhomirov P., *Vojvodina*, 18 December 2009, retrieved from <http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2009/12/18/voevodina/>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

secessionist tendencies not so much concerning independence, but mainly concerning a significant expansion of the autonomy rights of Vojvodina.

Therefore, the first priority of Vojvodina's Hungarians relates to the regional Vojvodina separatism, and only the second form of irredentism relates to the Republic of Hungary. This is clearly seen at all levels and is convincingly illustrated in the pages of the daily newspaper *Dnevnik*, published in the capital of APV, Novi Sad. For example, there were some publications expressing national separatist tendencies, including Hungarian ones, in 1998, 2006 and 2009, i.e. during periods of exacerbation of the situation around Kosovo. Even after the Orbán government of came to power in Hungary with bright «statist» ideas, neither *Dnevnik* nor other media outlets reacted to the calls of the new Hungarian prime-minister.

Moreover, when a group of young Hungarians tried to beat some representatives of the Serbian community, in September 2011, the prime-minister of APV, Bojan Paytich said: “Any manifestation of violence is impossible and disgusting. Especially if it has ethnic undertones”. Although the head of APV said that the perpetrators would be punished under the law, the young Hungarians got insignificant punishment. On the contrary, when a contrary incident occurred in February 2013, the Serbian youth got a rather tough punishment. These cases clearly demonstrate the current ethno-legal situation in the APV. Under such circumstances, local Hungarians do not actually have objective grounds for the manifestation of nationalism, national separatism and irredentism.<sup>16</sup>

Such a situation seriously complicates the actions of the Hungarian government to support irredentists sentiments among Hungarians in the APV, and also makes it impossible to apply there the same methods which Budapest is

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<sup>16</sup> *Vengriya vedet Serbiyu na novuyu kazn: Vengriya za nedely*, 17 November 2011, retrieved from <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1456756.html>, last accessed on November 15, 2014.

practicing in Slovakia and in the Ukrainian Transcarpathian region. Oddly enough, a major obstacle for the Hungarian policy in APV is not so much the government of Serbia, as Hungarians of Vojvodina themselves.

### ***5. Conclusions***

Of course, the «Greater Hungary» project is a political trend that is in line with similar political ideas of some Eastern European countries that have already joined the EU and NATO (similar ideas exist in Romania, Poland and Croatia at least). From the standpoint of contemporary political and legal aspects, its implementation is an issue of distant perspective, and only by way of initiating autonomist and separatist tendencies in countries where Hungarians live compactly (Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania and Serbia).

The Government of Hungary actively pursues the implementation of the project. Nowadays, however, its implementation seems unlikely. First, because the countries with dense population of Hungarians differ in terms of political and economic potential, and also in terms of international standing, especially in relation to other countries' encroachments on their territories. If the Government of Ukraine does not strongly oppose such attacks, the leaders of Slovakia do it more actively and those of Romania – quite actively. Besides, if the Hungarian populations of these countries is exposed to a greater or lesser degree to the actions of Budapest, in the Serbian province of Vojvodina this is not seen at all.

Therefore, the mission that lies ahead the official leaders of Hungary is to develop the policy influence over ethnic Hungarians, as well as over Kyiv, Bratislava, Bucharest and Belgrade. In fact, Hungary is compelled to elaborate four separate policies. However, Hungary is forced to restrain itself to specific means: because of its political positions in the EU and NATO, and on account of its limited economic resources.

Of course, the activation of Hungarian policy to create a «Greater Hungary» can occur at any time after the next change of government in Budapest, and in case of its radicalization. However, the disadvantages on this way are much bigger than the advantages, and Budapest comprehends it. Therefore, the slow prolongation of the «Greater Hungary» project led to medium- and long-term policies, at a relatively slow pace. And one can expect success only if the governmental actions of any country densely inhabited by ethnic Hungarians, in order to preserve its territorial and administrative integrity, become quite passive. Paradoxically and unfortunately, Ukraine is the weak center among the above mentioned four countries.

It should be noted that Budapest's policy on the issue of dual citizenship hides a desire to use the problem of ethnic Hungarians (who are nationals of neighboring countries) for political purposes. This can be a negative example for Central, Eastern and Western European countries, bringing in a significant element of tension at the international level. The use of the ethno-political factor by Hungary, through methods unacceptable to the neighboring countries, will inevitably lead to tensions, which are extremely unacceptable for Europe, especially in the context of the global financial crisis. That is, the European community has to develop a universal tool for peaceful and effective solutions to those international problems that have an ethno-political nature, such as those between Hungary and its neighbors. If an effective mechanism for solving ethno-political problems in the EU will not be developed in the near future, Europe may face the threat of right-wing Hungarian nationalism.

The issues of ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary must be solved taking into account the stands of governments of the states on whose territories they live. For their part, the Hungarian authorities should reckon with other ethnic groups, if they want to see the interests of ethnic Hungarians abroad taken into

account. Hungary has to comply with the international agreements that reinforce national boundaries and to fulfill its respective obligations.

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